

MENTAL HEALTH LOCAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

September 8, 2008 - MINUTES

In attendance: Council Members: Chairman Jacob Wagner, Kathy Berg, Tom Peluso, Jan Bjork, Sally Miller, Louise Brewster, Shelly Johnson, Lori Marchak, Vickie Groeneweg and Commissioner Bill Murdock; Advocacy Member: Dennis Cox (AMDD), and Andrea Lower (Court Services); Guests: Galen Eldridge (Montana Mental Health Association) Scott Malloy (GCMHC), Deb Pingrey (Public Assistance) and Vernon Bishop (SAA). Staff: Glenda Howze.

Call to Order and Introductions - 12:05 PM. Chairman Wagner opened the meeting and allowed for introductions.

Public Comment - Ms. Miller requested that the group discuss the legislative agenda. Mr. Vernon Bishop introduced himself and stated that he has taken over as chair of the SAA board. They are in the middle of a transition period and are also working on a final legislation package to be taken to the Summit in October. Ms. Lower reported that she spoke with Officer Marty Kent and the Bozeman Police Department will send a representative to future LAC meetings. Mr. Cox reported that Lou Thompson will be taking over Joyce DeCunzo's position at AMDD.

Ms. Miller stated that Ms. Berg and Mr. Johnson were the only individuals that completed the survey she distributed at the August meeting. The LAC needs to develop a subcommittee to work on the legislative agenda. She suggested that the Priority Table items be numbers in order to determine the LAC's priority for legislation. Mr. Peluso reviewed the SAA's priorities. Discussion took place regarding Mental Health Court. Ms. Lower and Ms. Bjork noted that a mental health court is very unlikely at any time in the near future in Gallatin County but other alternatives are being investigated. The Council agreed that the number one priority of the LAC is in-patient beds. Mr. Peluso suggested that the second priority might be "maintenance of the status quo funding." He also noted that working on the crisis beds will also assist with the transportation issue. There were nine responses to the request for statements of qualifications for the mental health campus, seven were local, 1 from Missoula and one from Helena. These will be evaluated on September 16th. Ms. Johnson stated that she would like to nominate "public education/outreach" as the second priority. Commissioner Murdock stated that he agrees, it should be top priority to get people to know that there is a mental health issue. Ms. Pingrey from the Office of Public Assistance stated that legislators love to hear stories, not statistics. They want to hear from those that have been thru a given subject. Discussion took place regarding how much the SAA members can be involved in testifying. If individuals testify as just that, individuals, and not as members of the SAA or MHOAC, they are welcome to testify. Ms. Miller stated that the LAC needs to determine what the message should be and how the message should be packaged. Mr. Peluso stated that the third priority should be adequate funding for MHSP. Ms. Brewster stated that we can't lobby, but need to learn how to not do that while also getting our message out. Ms. Miller requested volunteers for the legislative sub-committee. Ms. Marchak, Mr. Wagner, and Ms. Miller will comprise the sub-committee for now. The initial priority list is:

- 1) Crisis services/beds; 2) Maintain funding; 3) Public Outreach/Education and 4) Increase MHSP.

Mr. Bishop noted that the chairs of the 3 SAA regions will take the legislative priorities to the summit in one document. Ms. Miller stated that we need to determine where the LAC fits with their priorities.

Approval of Minutes - There were no minutes for approval.

Drop-In Center Update/Advisory Board Business - Mr. Malloy stated that there were 600 visits to the drop in center in July and August, 170 unduplicated people. Mr. Peluso stated that he is excited about the center. It is small but there is a lot of activity going on. Each day there is a dual-diagnosis AA meeting that is well attended and successful. Mr. Watson, the Center's director, is currently at training in Long Beach, CA. There are also two additional weekly support group meetings, the Connections program is operating and on October 1st there will be a peer-to-peer course start. The website is www.openarmsdrop-in.com. A volunteer is doing haircuts once a week and the center is open on Saturdays. There is lots of one-on-one and there is open case management offered once a week. Ms. Brewster noted that participants can get help with applications from 2-4 on Wednesdays also. Mr. Bishop stated that this center is open and successful and setting a great example. The Helena center is behind in getting open. Ms. Johnson reported that she visited about a week ago and everything looked great. Mr. Peluso reported that this is close to the VA which is of benefit. He also passed out brochures on the Family Promise program.

Report from Chairman Wagner re: Homeless Shelter - Mr. Wagner reported that Mr. Thomas was again too busy to attend this month but promised to try and do so next month. The shelter is coming along slowly with the assistance of SWMBIA.

Priority Table Updates: Including report from subcommittees - MHC - A new medical director is starting, Mike O'Neil, as the full-time psychiatrist, on September 22nd. Ms. Lower reported that the Mental Health/Criminal Justice sub-committee continues to work on the diversion piece. Public Defender Peter Ohman and County Attorney Marty Lambert are working on this as well. Ms. Bjork also stated that the housing linkage is in the plans as well. Ms. Marchak reported that she is the co-founder of a group psycho-therapy practice called "Gallatin Psycho-Therapy." Ms. Johnson reported that their (ADSGC) new location is now open and they will be having an open house soon. The half-way house, Olive Branch, is now open with a capacity of 8; there are currently 6 individuals in the house. Ms. Eldridge reported that the Mental Health Association warm line opened on September 1st. Primary consumers are staffing the warm line from their homes and soon an internet component of the warm line will be available. Also available on the warm line is an FYI session, an open chat night and a bipolar support group once a week. They are still executive director "hunting." Mr. Peluso noted that we've come a long way in the last few years with a lot of local initiative.

Other - Mr. Malloy inquired as to how to get the CSAA information to the LAC and vice versa. The minutes of the LAC are sent to the CSAA. Ms. Howze offered to give her email address to Mr. Bishop so that she can be added to the CSAA distribution list for future information and update sharing. Mr. Cox stated that he will get clarification on statute on legislative lobbying, testifying, etc.

Meeting adjourned at 1:10 PM